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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 004426

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARAGRAPHS 1 & 2)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/18/2029

TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IT](#) [ITALIAN POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: GIANFRANCO FINI IS (FINALLY) ITALY,S NEW FOREIGN MINISTER; BIO INFORMATION

REF: A. ROME 4313

[B](#). ROME 4268

Classified By: POL MINCOUNS THOMAS COUNTRYMAN, REASONS 1.5 (D).

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: Gianfranco Fini was (finally) appointed Italy's new Foreign Minister on November 18, following constant speculation on this outcome since the October 30 resignation of Rocco Buttiglione as Italy's nominee to the new European Commission and his replacement by ex-FM Franco Frattini. PM Berlusconi seems to have failed -- for now -- in his apparent attempt to use the potential nomination and other job appointments within the Government as leverage to bring his coalition into line and secure compromise (some might say capitulation) on his desired tax cuts; tax and budget negotiations continue. The official Italian news agency suggests Fini will retain his Deputy Prime Minister title, but still no word on whether Union of Christian Democrats of the Center (UDC) leader Marco Follini will be DPM as well. Fini is avowedly pro-American; we expect him to support Italy's current foreign policy priorities, including its strong support for us in Iraq. (See also Ref A.) While the tax and budget issues are highly contentious within the governing coalition, we do not expect them to topple the Berlusconi Government. END SUMMARY.

[2](#). (U) Gianfranco Fini was appointed Foreign Minister on November 18, 2004, replacing outgoing FM Franco Frattini, who became European Union Commissioner and EU Commission Vice President the same day. Prior to the appointment, Fini served as the Italian Government's Deputy Prime Minister since June 2001, in the wake of the victory of PM Silvio Berlusconi's center-right coalition at the general elections in May. In February 2002, Fini was named the Italian Government's representative to the Convention to develop the draft treaty of a new European Union Constitution. This experience increased his international exposure and allowed Italy,s European interlocutors to know him more closely. At the conclusion of the Convention's work in early 2004, Fini stepped up his foreign travels, gaining even greater visibility abroad. From February through November 2004, he traveled officially to Al Nasiriyah (Iraq, to visit the Italian troops), Riga, Tallin, Paris, Washington, D.C., Berlin, Hanoi, New York City (for the Columbus Day celebrations), Cairo, Moscow, Kabul, and Jerusalem. Earlier travels included all the Central and Eastern European capitals, Madrid, London, and again Jerusalem.

[3](#). (U) Fini's tenure as Deputy Prime Minister was his first experience in government, although he has a long history in politics. Fini is a member of the Chamber of Deputies, to which he was elected in 1983 and re-elected in 1987, 1992, 1994, 1996, and 2001. He was also a member of the European Parliament, to which he was elected in 1989, 1994, and again in 1999, relinquishing his position in 2001 to assume his Government commitments. In Parliament, until his entry into Government in 2001, he was an active member of the Constitutional Affairs, Public Works, Defense, Foreign Affairs/EU Policies, and Finance Committees, promoting numerous draft laws in all.

[4](#). (U) Fini is also the President of National Alliance (AN), the party he created in 1994 upon dissolution of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI). Previously, Fini led the MSI as its Secretary from 1991 to 1994, and earlier from 1987 to 1990. Although the MSI was a legal political force in the post-World War II Italian Republic, its links with Mussolini's Fascist Party prevented it from part of a coalition government through an unwritten pact among the Italian electorate and political forces.

[5](#). (U) Fifty years after the fall of Fascism, Fini saw the need to discard nostalgia and provide his electorate with a standing equal to that of Italy,s other voters. He criticized Fascism on several occasions since 1994, but never so clearly as his statements at the conclusion of a meeting with Israeli PM Ariel Sharon in Jerusalem in November 2003, when in response to specific press queries, Fini said Fascism was the &absolute evil,8 and added that the &negative pages8 in Italian history include &all those on the discrimination and persecution of Jews and other minorities,8 thereby directly rejecting the policies of Mussolini's Fascist Republic. AN has been a solid member of

Berlusconi's center-right coalition since its inception in 1994.

16. (U) Fini's political activity goes back to his high school days, when he joined the MSI and worked in the party full time. He was elected to the Rome City Council with the MSI in 1993, 1997, and 2001, collecting more votes than any other candidate in the latter two elections. From 1987 to

1992, he was MSI City Councilor in the summer resort town of San Felice Circeo, near Rome. From 1977 to 1983, he was a journalist in the MSI's daily newspaper &Secolo d'Italia.8 In 1977, he was appointed Secretary of the MSI's youth group, the &Fronte della Gioventu,8 a position he retained for ten years. That same year, he graduated from the University of Rome with a degree in psychology.

17. (C) Fini was born in Bologna on January 3, 1952. He is married to Daniela Fini and has one daughter. Mrs. Fini rarely appears in public with her husband, and is the subject of gossip as being coarse, crude, and an embarrassment to the smooth politician. His favorite hobbies are scuba diving, cross country kiing, and reading. He does not speak English.

18. (C) COMMENT: As noted Ref A, Fini -- an experienced politician with his own constituency -- can be expected to be somewhat more independent of PM Berlusconi than was Forza Italia and Berlusconi loyalist Frattini. Fini's interests in being Foreign Minister include strengthening his own credibility as a future Prime Minister and improving AN's electoral chances in 2005 regional and eventual national elections. To accomplish these, he must continue to differentiate himself from Berlusconi. This does not portend, however, radical changes in Italy's foreign policy. Fini is avowedly pro-American and inter alia a strong advocate of Italy's support for the U.S. in Iraq.

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